IMPROVISATION AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPING STUDENTS’ COMPETENCE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

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Learning English Language can be so cumbersome to learners, unless it is taught in an interesting way utilising appropriate learning resources. It is in this regard that adequate and appropriate selection and use of instructional media by both teacher and learner to facilitate better learning of the English language are most desirable.

An effective teacher should be able to make learning an imaginatively vital experience and seeks to foster the creative engagement of both teacher and the learners.

Improvisation in English is the act of using alternative resources to facilitate instructions for teaching wherever there are lack or specific first-hand teaching aids. Improvisation is an element of creativity and resource-fulness, it is the use of local resources in our immediate environment to build, construct, mould or make instructional teaching-learning materials that can assist in the smooth dissemination and transfer of knowledge from teachers to students. Improvisation develops skills in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains.

Improvisation is an excellent technique to use in the foreign language classroom as it motivates the learners to be active participants in authentic situations thereby reducing their self consciousness. At the beginning students will be hesitant and shy to participate in the activities, but after a few sessions they will become more enthusiastic and there will be a phenomenal improvement in their confidence level.

Improvisations are not role-plays or simulations (although many of them can be adapted as such). The objective here is total spontaneity and improvisation. Students have no time to prepare. Their roles and situations are given to them on the spot and they have to react immediately. Generally, the less details that are given to students, the better. This allows their own imaginations to construct situations and ensures richer dynamics.

Teachers are sometimes afraid that students may not be able to cope with improvisation. In reality, it is surprising just how imaginative students will be (subject to level, of course). They can usually be relied on to give more than they are asked for.

It is often helpful to give students conflicting objectives to ensure a more difficult resolution. For example, in the case of The Hypochondriac, the Doctor should not know his patient is a hypochondriac and the patient should not know that he is consulting a particularly tight-fisted doctor. (Whether the other students themselves know of this is a decision for the teacher.)

The following ideas are just that - ideas. They can be modified, adapted, changed, rethought, distorted, simplified, made more difficult etc.

In general, begin classes with pairs to warm up and finish with groups.

**Pair Improvisations**

**The Small Ad.** For sale/To rent/Friendship. Student A has seen a classified ad in the paper. Student A decides for herself the subject of the ad. She then chooses any other student (Student B, who has placed the ad) and calls her about it. "I'm calling about your ad for a live-in nanny..."

**The Hypochondriac.** Student A is a hypochondriac determined to have as many pills as possible. He consults Student B who is a doctor strongly averse to giving out pills willy-nilly.

**The Loan.** Asking to borrow. Then asking for repayment.

**The Career Counselor.** Student A has lost her job. She consults a career counselor about a suitable new profession. Lots of questions and advice (modals).

**The Clairvoyant.** Student A consults a clairvoyant. Asks questions about lover, money, health etc.

**Parent(s) and Child.** Child returns home late/doesn’t want to go to bed/doesn’t want to get up etc.

**At the Pearly Gates.** Individual interviews with St Peter to gain admission.

**The Journalist and the Famous Actress.** 1 Journalist tries to get interview. 2 Interview. 3 Actress is not at all happy with what is printed and complains (to journalist or editor etc).

**Directions.** A young girl stops passers-by in the street and asks for help/directions in finding an address.

**Telephone Chain.** Student A calls any student (Student B) about anything. When conversation finished, Student B calls any student (Student C) about anything. Keep the chain going. Must be fast. Good for warm-up. The answering student must make the next call (to maintain the dynamic).

**The Tourist.** Student A goes to another country (or planet) and calls home to tell Student B all about it.

**The Chance Meeting.** Two people who have not met for 5 years meet in a café/at a cocktail party etc. Ex-girlfriend, ex-boss etc.

**The Answering Machine.** Student A calls B and gets answering machine (B’s voice). Leaves message.

**Group Improvisations**

**The Fire.** Detective or journalist interviews witnesses (one of whom may be a suspect) about what they saw/heard/did. (The Fire can be changed to a Bizarre Noise, Disappearance, Murder, Theft etc). Lots of questions and past simple.

**The Hold-up.** Group of gangsters planning a hold-up. "Stop. Now it’s two days after the hold-up and you’re all in prison. Now discuss what actually happened, whose fault etc." Could be a Hi-jacking.

**Socio-economic Inquiry/Comparison.** Journalist interviews other students about their countries (hours, mentality, capital, pay, recreation etc). Suitable for mixed-nationality classes.

**Television Interview.** Filmstar, politician, sportsperson etc.

**Television Program.** Presenter interviews group of presidential candidates (or writers, film-makers etc).

**The Amnesiac.** Student A is in bed in hospital, having lost his memory. The other Students are medical staff, police officers, visitors (family, friends etc) who try to bring memory back. They must be careful. A shock could be fatal.

**Press Conference.** Group of journalists interview a politician (or sportsperson, filmstar etc).

**The Extra-terrestrials.** Two female aliens have come to Earth. Their appearance is totally human. Their mission is to procreate because they need to repeople their planet. They accost any unsuspecting male they can find, asking discreet questions to test them and so find suitable mates. They must be careful not to reveal the truth to the males because this will frighten them.

**The Putsch.** 1 Why: Guerrilla chief explains to followers. 2 Commitment: one or two outsiders want to join - therefore interview to test suitability. 3 Preparation: planning meeting. 4 Afterwards (in prison): interview with journalist about what went wrong.

**Teachers’ Meeting.** Teachers discuss imaginary students to decide who should continue next year. One teacher is the ‘chairman’ and has a list of students ("Now we’ll discuss Erika...")

**The Neighbour.** A neighbour who needs to sleep or revise etc knocks on door and complains about the noise from a party.

**The Adulterer.** Starts with wife and lover. Husband arrives. Or vice versa.

CONCLUSION

Improvisation is an appealing teaching strategy which promotes cooperation, collaboration, self-control, goal-oriented learning as well as emotional intelligence skills. Improvisation bridges the gap between course-book dialogues and natural usage, and can also help to bridge a similar gap between the classroom and real life situations by providing insights into how to handle tricky situations. If improvisation is considered as a teaching method in the sense of being part of the eclectic approach to language teaching, then it can become a main aid in the acquisition of communicative competence. Improvisation activities facilitate the type of language behaviour that should lead to fluency, and if it is accepted that the learners want to learn English language in order to make themselves understood in the language, then, improvisation does indeed, further this end. Improvisation encourages adaptability, fluency, and communicative competence. It puts language into context, and by giving learners experience of success in real-life situations it should arm them with confidence for tackling the world outside the classroom. Improvisation encourages students to mobilize their vocabulary, respond to grammatical and syntactical accuracy, and develop cultural and social awareness, and gain confidence and fluency. Improvisation is the practice of acting, singing, talking and reacting, of making and creating, in the moment and in response to the stimulus of one's immediate environment and inner feelings. This can result in the invention of new thought patterns, new practices, new structures or symbols, and/or new ways to act.